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ABSTRACT

As a last resort to catalyze change in its innercity schools, Memphis City School District (Tennessee) designated seven schools as school-based decision-making (SBDM) sites in April 1989. In the same month, Memphis State University researchers were appointed official observers/researchers of SBDM implementation. Not to be confused with school-based management, SBDM is a participatory process that shifts decision-making to the local school level and gives all affected parties a voice. This paper examines issues and processes related to a school administrative structure that replaces the traditional top-down bureaucratic management with a democratic strategy including urban parents as decision-makers. Ms. Apple's experiences during the first 3 years of the Memphis reform illustrate that personal and school changes can result when a low-income parent who lacks formal education and lives in public housing has opportunity and support, through district policy changes, to become a school level decision-maker. Ms. Apple's development from volunteer to leader to activist is described within this context as she struggles to become a viable decision-maker and accepted member of Urban Elementary School's political structure. (27 references) (MLH)

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The Impact of School-Based Decision Making: A Case Study

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Running Head: PARENT EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract

This paper examines issues and processes related to a school administrative restructure that replaces the traditional top-down bureaucratic management with a more democratic strategy that includes urban parents as school decision makers. Ms. Apple's experiences during the first three years of such a reform illustrate that personal and school changes can result when a low income parent who lacks formal education and lives in public housing has opportunity and support, through district policy changes, to become a school level decision maker. Ms. Apple's development is described within this context and presents her struggle to become a viable decision-maker and accepted member of Urban Elementary School's political structure.

The Impact of School-Based Decision Making:
A Case Study

> I didn't understand, at first, the role I was supposed to play as the chairperson. I was, like well, I am going to go in there and sit down and they've got teachers and the principal, you know, the head of the school and they are basically going to tell me what to do. (Ms. Apple, 1990)

With these thoughts, Ms. Apple[1], an elected member of Urban Elementary's local school council, began her tenure as chairperson of that council. This paper examines her experiences over three years as she developed from a self-conscious follower to a self assured activist who is committed to the concept of school-based decision making (SBDM) as a mechanism for positively changing the inner city school her daughter attends. Ms. Apple, one of four parent key informants, is a prototype of the experience and impact of inner city parents who are involved in school decision making. Her case is part of the larger study examining the school restructure processes[2].

In April, 1989, as a last resort effort to catalyze change in its inner city schools, Memphis City School District officials, in cooperation with NEA officials, designated seven schools as deregulated by releasing them from many contractual agreements and district policies. This began the establishment of school based decision making. In that same month, Memphis State University researchers requested to be designated the official observer/researchers of SBDM implementation. Since then, in collaboration with parents, teachers, and administrators we have observed and recorded the events and processes associated with this restructure.

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[1]Pseudonyms are used for people and places to protect their anonymity.

[2]This research is supported by the Center for Research in Educational Policy, Memphis State University.

Not to be confused with school based management (SBM), SBDM is a participatory decision making process that shifts decision making to the local school level giving all parties affected by a decision a voice in making the decision. School based management, however, does not have a precise meaning. It sometimes is equated with SBDM but can also refer to a simple shift of management to the local school level without including decision making authority. SBM can also mean assignment of decision making authority to only one group at the local school level while precluding other local school groups from that authority. In Memphis, school based decision making is based on Marburger's (1989) model. It is intended to be a horizontal process whereby principals, teachers, parents, students, and community residents, the people closest to the school and students, consult and come to decisions through consensus (Herenton, 1989).

We have known that parents benefit when they are involved in their children's preschool education (Lane, Elzey, & Lewis, 1971; Gordon, 1968; Miller, 1968). Since the 1960's, Head Start programs have included parents into the planning of schooling for their children. Title I and Chapter I programs have also required parental participation through advisory councils. Recent literature advocates not only for parental involvement, but focuses on the importance of parents being involved as decision-makers in the school if school programs will be improved. Comer (1988), for example, believes that for schools to be effective, parents must play a major role in all aspects of school life, particularly management and governance. He emphasizes that teachers, families, and students must work together in a democratic setting to promote the social, emotional, and academic growth of children. Levin's (1987) accelerated schools model has expanded into a national network of schools. An essential component includes parents as resource people and decision makers. Increasingly inner city school programs are involving parents and community members in participatory and advocacy roles (Epstein and Dauber, 1991).

This paper examines processes and issues related to the restructuring of traditional top-down school administration to a more democratic approach that includes parents as decision makers. Ms. Apple's experiences during the first three years of this

reform illustrate what can happen when a low income parent who lacks formal education, lives in public housing, and has never been a school decision maker has opportunity, through district policy changes, to become a school level decision maker. Ms. Apple's development is described within this context and presents her struggle to become a viable decision-maker and accepted member of Urban Elementary School's political structure.

The Management Restructure

Decentralization and school based management are not new. Since the 1970 inception of decentralization in the New York City Public School System (Rogers, 1981), there have been efforts to increase community control of urban schools and bring the schools closer to the people. Memphis planners drew heavily from recommendations of Marburger (1989) and the National Education Association (1989) when establishing school based decision making. The uniqueness of SBDM in Memphis is the strategy with which personnel volunteered to work under SBDM. The seven targeted schools were closed and reopened as deregulated, SBDM schools. All professional staff were asked to resign their positions which were then posted as vacant. The assumption was that inner city schools can successfully teach students only if the professional staff desires to work in the inner city. Likewise, successful implementation of SBDM hinges on people desiring to work under that management structure. The closings provided a psychological break with past practice as well as an opportunity to restaff the schools.

The local school council (LSC) is the primary vehicle through which the decision making authority is shared (Etheridge, Hall, Brown & Lucas, 1990; Etheridge, Terrell, & Watson, 1990; Memphis City Schools SBDM Advisory Council, 1989). Two parents, three classroom teachers, and one community member are elected to the council by their peers in the school's attendance zone. Initial elections were held in October, 1989 after student enrollments were final and new faculty were settled in their schools. Parent representatives were elected by parents of currently enrolled students and teacher representatives were elected by the new faculty. The principal automatically serves on the council but cannot be its chairperson. The chairperson must be a parent or community resident as an effort to avoid the automatic professional dominance of the council, identified by Gittell (1977) as related to advisory council ineffectiveness. Part

of the reason New York City's plan during the late 1960's ran into trouble was employee domination of community boards (Hess, 1991).

The local school council's role is to set school goals, advise and recommend operational and program procedures and local school expenditures. In addition, the council interviews all potential professional personnel, including the candidates for principal, and submits recommendations of assignment or reassignment to the superintendent who makes final personnel recommendations to the school board. Each council member's task is to represent and present the issues and perspectives of his/her constituent group. Decisions are to be made through consensus.

Urban Elementary

The attendance zone of Urban Elementary School includes four public housing projects and is described as a "heavy poverty area" with a 97.2 percent black population (Commercial Appeal, 1989). Many buildings which once housed businesses are boarded up and deteriorating. Of 1,396 housing units only 25 are owner-occupied. According to U.S. Census figures (1980, 1990) the area experienced a 20 percent decrease in population.

Urban school's student body became all black in 1947. Urban elementary was not included under court ordered integration mandates handed down in 1973, so it was and remains a neighborhood school to which all the children walk (Etheridge, 1984). Currently, 97 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunches. Low achievement test scores and attendance and discipline problems characterize Urban Elementary.

Ms. Apple

In 1985 Apple was invited to a parent training seminar held at an old school building that had been reopened as a community center. The school district's racial relations and supplemental services division was located in the building. Through this division, training and support services were provided for neighborhood residents. Ms. Apple explained how they were the beginning of her involvement:

> My little girl and I would go to the parent meetings and they would tell us, 'Don't wait until your child starts school, you need to know what things are going on inside the school system, what things are there for you, what things are free, what they need you to do, and to understand the process before the time [before your child starts school]. . . . .The next year my child started kindergarten and instead of sleeping late and watching soap operas I had to get up and get dressed to take her to school. I would go home and go back to sleep, but I had to come back to get her. I said, 'You are not doing anything through the day', so I would go and volunteer my time wherever they needed me. I would work in the cafeteria or help as a volunteer teacher aide. That is how I got involved. . . . It has been five and a half years now since I began my volunteer work at Urban. My commitment has been and will continue to be to the students and teachers by helping in the classroom, lunchroom, sock hops, field trips, and in the library. My experiences have been both rewarding and fulfilling; I just love being of help.

Before her child began school the idea to get involved and informed were planted. She saw the importance of being involved in her child's school and so continued to volunteer her services. Thus, the outreach of the school district resulted in the acquisition of an able school volunteer.

One of Joyce Epstein's five ingredients for involving parents in their children's educations is for parents to work as volunteers at the school and to attend and support events and meetings (Warner, 1991). Volunteer work is a creative way for parents to be involved in their children's education. It is a beginning step toward increasing parental knowledge of school affairs and understanding the problems schools face. But parental involvement is more than volunteer work and cookie sales (Coletta, 1977; Davies, 1987; Kanter, 1991). Apple's work as a volunteer at Urban Elementary was only a beginning step in her personal growth and school involvement. It made her visible to teachers and administrators so that her name was mentioned three years later when the school management restructure was begun and parents were sought to participate on the

initial interview committee. Ms. Apple declined to be on that committee. Two months later, however, parents were needed to be candidates for the local school council. Again, Ms. Apple refused but she was encouraged by teachers who said she was active at the school and would be doing the same things she had already been doing. To this point, Apple was a volunteer. She did what school professionals told her to do. In her mind being a council member would simply be another form of volunteerism. She figured she could do it in her spare time and, in her words, "It would be a piece of cake."

Apple actively campaigned for herself. She knocked on doors telling people about the new council and asked for their votes. On election day she prodded people to come. It is necessary to go out to the people, she asserted, "Because they are stones. They sit and watch their soaps and collect their welfare checks." But she understood and was patient because, she explained, "I used to be a stone but somebody moved me. Now I try to move other people." Without the encouragement of school professionals, Apple may never have volunteered at the school let alone serve as a decision maker on the council. She may have been encouraged by school professionals because she was a reliable, nonthreatening volunteer. Everyone (teachers, principal, and Ms. Apple) expected that she would fill her usual role of doing what she was told. The status quo was safe.

Volunteer to Leader

Low-income parents face significant obstacles in getting involved in schools (Reed and Sautter, 1990). Frequently they are school drop-outs or speak non-standard English. These parents may feel threatened by educated school professionals and stay away from schools. Teachers often feel low-income parents are not capable of making useful contributions to the schools and might interfere in areas best handled by school professionals (Henderson, 1988). Reed and Sautter (1990), contrary to popular belief, report that inner-city parents are interested in their children's education and can play a key role in the school. Apple's experience verifies Reed and Sautter's position.

Apple was elected to the school council and at the first meeting she was elected chairperson. Apple was uncertain about her roles as council member and

chair. She knew, however, the perspective and needs of parents in the school community. From her own experience, she was acutely aware of the educational gap between parents and teachers and the threat it posed to herself and other parents:

> In order to tell the parents and make them understand, we have to use different language. Because [teachers] use a lot of educational terms, I will turn to a teacher and I ask, 'now what does that mean?'. . . Parents don't know and they don't want anyone to know they don't understand. Parents are actually scared for someone to ask them some things because [parents] don't know what they are saying yes or no to. That is why in a lot of meetings or teachers' conferences, [parents] freeze up. [Parents] know the teacher has a higher education and is going to be speaking about things they know nothing about.

Initially, Apple was scared; she waited to be told what to do. During this period and intermittently through the three years, Apple received continuous training from school district parent trainers from the same department that originally involved her in her daughter's school. Apple enthusiastically attended all training sessions offered by the school district and brought the information back to Urban's council. She was conscientious about remembering and implementing with her school council the knowledge and skills learned in training. Apple, like other parents involved with SBDM, frequently went to the trainers with questions and requests for assistance. They responded to parent queries with information dealing with meeting processes, budgeting, advocacy, and setting school policy (Etheridge, Hall, Valesky, & Polizzi, 1992) as well as more basic training in roles, responsibilities, and how to run meetings. Through training Apple came to understand that she should be an initiator. During her first year as chair, she began to ask Urban's principal why things were done the way they were. In her words, "He would give me a look". She would respond, "I think this is what I am supposed to be doing." Then he would say, "You're right, come on in and let's talk about it."

When Apple realized she really was supposed to function as the chairperson of the local school council, Apple took the job seriously. She insisted that a regular meeting time be established. She suggested everyone read council guidelines and she expressed the need for training in school budgeting if that was going to be the first item of council business. She always had an agenda for each meeting. She was honest and open about concerns and sought help for those things she did not know how to handle. Most importantly, she saw to it that parent's views were heard and considered.

From the beginning, Apple voiced a concern and need for all council members to pull together; she told them the effort would not work if everyone did not pull together. She wanted everyone, including school faculty, to "give and take a little and not work behind folks' backs." She encouraged people to speak their minds.

A concern emerged among Urban's teachers, after the first year of SBDM implementation, that Apple was controlling the council; that she and a teacher representative had formed a clique and were ramroding decisions through. Observations and interviews never verified this accusation. However, this teacher had taught Apple's daughter and Apple felt comfortable discussing issues with her and asking her for advice. Apple pinpointed the source of the problem when she explained that some teachers thought parents had no business being on the council because parents knew nothing about "educational things." But, as Apple explained, when the council dealt with issues involving knowledge of educational matters she knew her role and had a strategy:

> [I] would step back and let those who had the training get to work on it. It would be silly for me to run something dealing with reading when I don't know anything about it. [Teachers] didn't know that we are not going to be touching things we know nothing about.

In addition, Apple confronted such accusations in open discussion. Thus, Apple emerged from being a passive volunteer to a leader who organized, pushed, and prodded others to action. She was also criticized for being this kind of leader.

Leader to Activist

During the summer of 1990, Apple was very enthusiastic about the possibilities for the new school year. The council meeting time changed to the afternoon so more teachers could attend and the PTO would be discussing issues of interest to parents. However, Apple still felt many parents did not feel welcome at the school because they thought teachers looked down on them. She envisioned educating parents through PTO so they could feel more comfortable talking with teachers.

The 1990-91 school year began and Apple's excitement was still high by the end of October when the school held PTO elections and more parents than teachers were elected officers. With Apple's encouragement, a father was elected president. He planned to involve more men in the school. In addition, Apple observed more parents than ever coming to pick up their children's first report cards and she witnessed more men bringing their children to school.

However, by the end of November, Apple was becoming disillusioned with the SBDM processes. She observed training had stopped and she was not informed of school activities. At a meeting with the district's staff development trainer, Apple asked if there was a lull in interest from the central office. The trainer explained that since budget cuts, the staff working with SBDM were also doing other jobs and were spread rather thin. She also explained that the new director of the program was having to learn about SBDM. This did not allay Ms. Apple's concern about the absence of training.

Apple kept waiting for something to happen to make her feel things were not in a lull; she wanted information from central office and she wanted to compare notes with others. The council had not met since November, 1990. She expressed frustrations over meetings being cancelled and other last minute meetings called by the principal. Apple feared the school had returned to its pre-SBDM days and that the principal was happier that way. She felt he resented her position of leadership as a parent and that he was treating her better since they were not having council meetings. Because of the absence of regular training and regular contact with district officials, Apple felt increasingly uncomfortable calling central office personnel for help, as she had the year before. She had

decided to talk to one of the parent trainers at a meeting to be held in January of 1991.

Apple expressed her frustrations to parent trainers and other council chairs. Apple was still upset with the principal because he was not keeping her informed as in the first year of SBDM implementation when regular meetings were held and Apple and Urban's principal received the same information, including budget materials. In this second year, Apple was also a member of two school committees dealing with teacher assistants and parent involvement. Chairs for the committees had been elected but she was neither informed about nor attended any meetings. Only teachers on the committees met and she and other parents were left out of the process.

Apple's sense of estrangement from the school intensified in March, 1991 when she attempted to attend a faculty meeting. The principal met her at the door and told her she could not attend because it was for the faculty only. Angry, Apple called the SBDM director, and then wrote a letter expressing her concern over how difficult the present school year had been for her as a member and chairperson of the local school council. She listed her concerns:

1. Nonchalant attitude by the principal when discussing parental concerns
2. No communication from the principal with me concerning any matter
3. No follow through when information is needed from principal
4. Lack of teacher participation/enthusiasm
5. School climate
6. The inability to utilize all/any of the training provided for the local school council.

She added that the principal did not view her as a vital member of the SBDM team, that her opinions were neither valued nor respected. She explained, parents would not be encouraged to participate in the school's activities if they received "demeaning treatment". "If deregulated/SBDM schools are to work, we as parents must know that we are a part of the process and that our opinions and contributions are appreciated."

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In a response letter to her, the SBDM director wrote that Apple did not have the right to attend faculty meetings as the school board's attorney had rendered the opinion that they were "exempt from the Sunshine Law". Subsequently, the director attended a council meeting at the school at the request of the principal and Apple. Word spread around the school that a parent had written a letter criticizing the principal and a number of faculty members attended the meeting. During the meeting, Apple asked for a definition of day-to-day school operations and clarification of the principal's and council's responsibilities. The director explained that the council was a planning body and the principal was responsible for implementation of plans. As the discussion continued about keeping the council aware of what was going on in the school, a teacher interjected that the faculty had been kept informed. Apple replied that it was all well and good for the faculty to be kept informed, but, "what about the parents and community?" Apple reiterated that her role was to let parents and community know what was going on at the school. Following that meeting, teachers confided to Apple that they too felt uninvolved. Apple realized that teachers were confused like parents were and more structure was needed. At her insistence, bylaws and guidelines were developed for the local school council and school committees.

Progressively Apple realized that neither teachers nor the principal really wanted parents involved in school activities or decisions about school practices. With that realization she was increasingly bothered but did not speak to anyone about her concern until events in May, 1991 caused her to take action. Apple's sister sent a letter of concern to the council. The school's tap dancers had performed at a school function but parents were not invited to attend. Apple and her sister restated this concern at a faculty meeting. It was explained to them that the room was too small to accommodate extra people so parents were not invited. Apple pointed out that parents were not invited on field trips or to attend school parties, "even if they paid their own way." Teachers then asserted that "parents had to trust" teachers to do what was right for the children. Apple responded that a letter of explanation sent home would help build parent trust. This exchange reinforced Apple's perception that though parent participation was

an integral part of the SBDM initiative, teachers were uncomfortable with parental presence. In this meeting, however, teachers recognized that Apple was serious and would not go away. They agreed to develop a procedure for dealing with parent participation in field trips and other activities.

The 1990-91 school year ended with Apple still feeling that her relationship could be better with the principal. In June, the council met with the SBDM director to evaluate the principal. It was his first evaluation since the SBDM process began. Apple worried over being honest or sitting back and not saying anything; she was scared. At the meeting, when the director asked for council input, no one said anything. Apple was increasingly nervous. She tapped her pencil to the point that a teacher told her she thought the pencil would break. Apple could stand it no longer; she spoke up and expressed her concern about the principal. The director, however, wanted her expressions as a numerical rating. She replied, "This is hard for me. When I say things, I don't know what percentage---I just have comments. This is more than I was expecting." She did not want to play the role of "hatchet" and she did not want to give the principal a number rating. She simply wanted him to know that she was unhappy about some things, such as whose responsibility it was to see that council decisions were carried out.

Throughout the remainder of the summer of 1991, Apple had a new attitude about everything. She and the principal were in contact all summer; she knew what was being planned, and she again felt included in the decision making process. Apple no longer simply organized and did what the school professional's rules, guidelines, and training suggested to her. She became a leader who spoke up. Her actions caused professionals at Urban School to begin to change their behavior and view of her. Her actions catalyzed movement toward institutionalization of the local school council and a formalization of the council's authority. In addition, she set a precedent for parental input becoming a regular part of the school's decision making structure.

Apple's growth and development was accompanied by support which she sought from people whom she trusted; in this case, professional parent trainers. Williams and Chavkin (1989) describe strong parent involvement programs as

having continuous training for parents. When Apple's training stopped and she perceived there to be no support, she became frustrated and less active but because she knew the support was available, she sought and received it.

Activist to Advocate

At the beginning of the 1991-92 school year, Urban had a new problem. The school board had redefined attendance zones resulting in a reduction of students enrolled at Urban. This threatened the loss of one or more teachers. As the deadline for final student attendance count neared, the principal wrote a letter asking for more time since the school lacked only 20 students. The week final enrollment figures were due, the school was still nine students short and was set to lose one teacher. Out of frustration teachers came to Apple with their concern that no action was being taken to preserve the teacher position. The local school council had tried to submit a waiver request to personnel, but they were told there would be no exceptions to the teacher/student formula. A teacher was already scheduled for transfer to another school. At Apple's suggestion, she, the reassigned teacher, and a teacher assistant canvassed the neighborhood. They knocked on doors to find children and located three who were not registered. One parent hesitated to enroll her child for fear the child would get a certain teacher. Apple returned to the school, walked into the principal's office, and told him: "I know I don't have the authority, but I told [the parent] that her child would not have [certain teacher]. I know you can take care of that," and he did. Apple went to teachers and the principal whom she knew to have elementary age children. She did not request; but told them to enroll their children in Urban School. They protested the legality of it but she insisted and they complied. The teaching positions were saved.

Apple cited this incident as an example of everyone in the school pulling together. When teachers came to her asking that she do something about the situation, she did not feel she had the authority, but she felt she had to do what she could to save those teaching positions. She and the school professionals were thrilled with the results and Apple felt she would now be a respected decision making participant. In November, 1991, she lamented:

> [The Principal] is back to doing his old things. He isn't conferring with me as much. Good things are being started, but he isn't telling me about them. They are just being okayed by him and being started. He is still coming to me with big decisions that might get the [SBDM] Director's attention. He comes to me with a paper to sign. Things that will not go outside the school he is making decisions about without informing me. . . . I am not a show-dog. I am not going to tap dance when I didn't have a part in making a decision. . . . [I] keep my mouth shut about some things because I know they are good for the kids, but he is still not involving me in the decision-making.

In December, 1991 Apple, with other parent and community council members from the SBDM schools, attended the annual Community Education Conference held in St. Louis. The trip was organized by the parent trainers from the Division of Community and Race Relations and funded by grant money from the Kaiser Foundation. The group from Memphis was small (under 20) so the five hour bus trip to St. Louis provided opportunity for parents from the SBDM schools to network. Conference sessions included topics on how parent and community members can be active in the schools. After the meetings, parents were enthusiastic about their new understanding that they should organize and advocate. As one parent explained, "Now we know what we're supposed to do". They planned during the five hour bus trip home. Among their first goals were to gain clarification of their roles and responsibilities as local school council members and chairpersons and to gain a policy statement from the school board formalizing the local school council's decision making authority. Although the parent trainers advised them to work through the district bureaucracy, the parents decided to go directly to the school board requesting answers to the following questions: Are we really deregulated? Are we decision makers or advisors? When will intense training begin? Apple collaborated with the other parents in drafting a letter to the school board. One parent, a council chairperson from another school, was designated to read the letter at the

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December school board meeting. They stated that parents were not being included in shared decision making at the schools. It further explained:

> We as parents and community residents were excited. At long last the school system was going to involve us in meaningful ways. Unfortunately, however, and in most instances, it's still business as usual in the deregulated [SBDM] schools. What should have been a collaboration among parents, teachers, residents, and administrators is little more than a grand sham...We ask you if you really want parents to be involved in school governance in ways that go beyond the cake bake sale... We as parents and community residents are convinced that school based decision making will work if it is given the proper authority and support at all levels of the [city] school system.

Apple signed the letter, and was subsequently reprimanded by district and union officials for signing her name as a council chair. She was told she should have signed only as a parent. However, her belief in the concept of shared decision making and the involvement of parents spurred her to advocate for parents and the institutionalization of SBDM. Her advocacy with the other parents was followed by three school board members supporting the issue and starting processes to make a policy statement regarding LSC authority.

Apple continues to worry about the future of SBDM and her school. As her following statement implies, she believes parental involvement as school decision makers will result in improvement of her local school:

> SBDM is the best thing to come along for inner-city schools. If SBDM fails, [our] schools may close down. It is our only chance to have schools as good as those in the suburbs. Despite talk about equality, inner city schools don't have the same things as suburban schools, or the optional schools.

Perspective

Apple placed great importance on the SBDM restructure because she knew that parents were usually observers not involved in the school decisions and not

viewed by professionals as interested. SBDM not only provided opportunity for parents to have meaningful impact on the school but gave them authority as decision makers.

Feeling ownership of problems leads to commitment and action. Boyd (1991) suggested that "We need more knowledge about how to help poor and educationally disadvantaged parents assist their children in becoming good students." In Apple's case, knowledge led her from being a stereotypically inactive welfare mother to a volunteer in her neighborhood school to involvement as a decision maker and leader. She became an activist and advocate for her child's school and for parental involvement in that school. Apple did not become an activist on her own, she had support from the district in the form of training and encouragement from teachers and other professionals. In fact, her growth toward being an advocate and activist progressed only when she was receiving support and training from professionals in the school district. Gaps in training and support occurred concurrently with lulls in Apple's growth and activity. These lulls occurred in the absence of training and support because not all professionals at Urban School solicited parent involvement or wholeheartedly accepted inner city parents as capable decision makers. Apple had to be persistent and insistent in her efforts to be involved as a decision maker. It is doubtful she would have made the progress described here without training and support from outside the school.

Apple illustrates how one urban parent became empowered to take action for school change. Her efforts and their results are still small but they predict changes in the school that would impact children. While the school's primary mission is not parental development, Apple's case suggests that low income urban parents, with training and support, can also positively impact schools. Therefore, urban schools have a vested interest in providing parent training and including them as decision-makers. Apple's experience suggests a wealth of potential for positive change in the urban school and neighborhood, students, and individuals if school districts enable inner city parents to become involved in the opportunities offered by school based decision making.

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